FAQ: Youth Engagement Zones

revised 5/21/10

The Application

1. **Where can we find the application materials?**
   The *Notice of Funding Availability* (NOFA) and the *Application Instructions* are available at:
   http://www.learnandserve.gov/for_organizations/funding/nofa_detail.asp?tbl_nofa_id=82

2. **Can attachments or hyperlinks be included with an application?**
   No. If this information is important, you should work it into the narrative.

3. **Will we be notified by LSA whether we are funded or not?**
   Successful applicants will be notified. Applicants that are not funded will also be notified and may request additional information regarding their application by making a written request to Learn and Serve America. We anticipate making announcements in mid-September.

4. **If we are a successful grantee, when is the projected program start date?**
   All programs will need to begin on or before Sept. 30, 2010.

5. **Who will score the Learn and Serve America applications? Will each application be read by more than one person?**
   Applications will be read by more than one reviewer. They are all rated against the published selection criteria. Successful applications are selected through an extensive process that will include multiple levels of review and approval by the Corporation's Chief Executive Officer. Avoid using abbreviations or language that may not be familiar to reviewers. In the final review stages, the Corporation will also seek to balance the grant portfolio with a geographically and programmatically diverse group of grantees.

6. **Where can we find information on previously funded applications?**
   Learn and Serve America has not previously funded any Youth Engagement Zone grantees. This is the pilot of a new initiative authorized by the 2009 Serve America Act and funded through the FY 2010 appropriation to Learn and Serve America.

7. **If we have more questions as we move through this application process, whom should we contact?**
   For the fastest possible response, we encourage you to email your questions to **yez@cns.gov**. You can also call Learn and Serve America at **202-606-7510.**
   For more information, you can visit the competition website:
   http://www.learnandserve.gov/for_organizations/funding/nofa_detail.asp?tbl_nofa_id=82
   For technical questions related to eGrants, please see the eGrants section of this FAQ below.

8. **Are deadline extensions possible?**
   Late applications may be accepted only in extenuating circumstance if the applicant submits a letter explaining what caused the delay. Such letter must be sent to the Corporation via email to **yez@cns.gov** no later than one business day after the application due date. Late applications are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

We strongly recommend that you create your eGrants account and begin your application at least three weeks prior to the final submission deadline and begin pasting your application into eGrants no later than ten days before the deadline. This will allow you time to address technical issues prior to the deadline.
Contact the eGrants Help Desk at **1-888-677-7849** (talk to an associate or leave a detailed message) or email **egrants@cns.gov** immediately if a problem arises while you are creating your account, preparing, or submitting your application. Be prepared to provide your application ID. If technical issues are preventing you from submitting your application in eGrants by the deadline, you must contact the eGrants Help Desk prior to the 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time deadline to explain your technical issue and get a ticket number. If your issue cannot be resolved by the deadline, you must continue working with the eGrants Help Desk to submit your application.
In the event of prolonged unavailability of the eGrants system on the date of submission, the Corporation reserves the right to extend the eGrants submission deadline. A notice will be posted in eGrants and on **http://www.nationalservice.gov**.

Youth Engagement Zone Structure and Partnership

1. **How should we outline our Youth Engagement Zone?**
   It is up to your organization and partners to determine the parameters of the Zone itself. The Zone should be a well-defined, contiguous target area of an appropriate size to engender a closely coordinated effort amongst the partners.

2. **How should we determine the parameters of our Youth Engagement Zone?**
   Evaluate what is reasonable and achievable in relation to the program's stated outcomes, the target demographic, and the approximate size of the grant awards. You will want to define a well-contained (read: not overly large) Zone; this grant is intended to catalyze youth engagement in a defined target area.

   The goal of this initiative is to engage youth that do not already have opportunities to participate in service-learning – either through school or community-based programs. The requirements related to the schools are to reflect that the target population of secondary school students described in the application guidance. The purpose of this competition is to provide concentrated support to youth within a particular Zone (as opposed to all of a metropolitan area). A successful Zone is one in which at least one community-based entity, one community college and one or more secondary schools are part of the program design.

3. **Who should we designate as the Lead Applicant?**
   It is up to your partnership to determine who will serve as the legal grant recipient. The Lead Applicant must have administrative capacity, organizational commitment and a physical location in the Zone.

4. **Does the Lead Applicant need to be located within the Zone?**
   Yes. The Lead Applicant itself must be located within the Zone.

5. **If we are a large organization with branches (school district, state-wide non-profit, etc.) can we apply on behalf of one or more of our subsidiaries?**
   No. The Lead Applicant itself must have an office within the Zone.

6. **Can you describe the partnership?**
   The Corporation seeks applications from two types of partnerships:
   * Existing partnerships of two or more community entities that have an established track record of working together to address a particular community issue. They will seek to engage youth in service activities that address that issue(s).
   * Existing partnerships of youth-serving organizations / social service providers that have an established track record of collaboration. They will seek to engage the youth they serve in service activities that address community needs.

7. **Who must be involved in the partnership?**
   The Youth Engagement Zone partnership *must* include a Local Education Agency, a Community College, and a Community-Based Entity. It *may* also include any number of other entities such as institutions of

higher education, community or faith-based organizations, Indian tribes, local or municipal governments, etc.

8. **For the purposes of this grant competition, what is a Local Education Agency (LEA)?**
   An LEA is defined by the State. For this competition, it may include one or more public secondary schools or entire school district(s). The secondary schools in question are characterized by ≥70% free and reduced price lunch eligibility and ≤70% graduation rate.

9. **For the purposes of this grant competition, what is a Community College?**
   A community college is an accredited public institution of higher education, primarily featuring a two-year Associate's Degree or certificate program. The institution must have existing connections to the LEA and/or youth-serving organizations. A list of community colleges can be found on the American Association of Community Colleges website: **http://www.aacc.nche.edu/pages/ccfinder.aspx**.

10. **For the purposes of this grant competition, what is a Community-Based Entity?**
    A community-based entity is a public or private non-profit organization that has experience addressing unmet educational, environmental or public safety needs. Examples might include institutions of higher education, community or faith-based organizations, Indian tribes, local or municipal governments, etc.

Eligibility

1. **How do we know if our organization is eligible?**
   Eligibility guidelines can be in the NOFA (page 4).

2. **If our LEA meets one but not both of the "70% and 70%" requirements, are we eligible? Or, most of the schools within our proposed partnership meet the "70% & 70%" requirement, but some don't. Are we eligible to apply?**
   No. All of the target secondary school(s) must be characterized by ≥70% free and reduced price lunch eligibility AND ≤70% graduation rate. All of the students and school(s) defined in your proposed Zone must meet the criteria set forth in the NOFA. You may consider establishing a zone that includes a sub-set of secondary schools rather than the whole LEA.

3. **The school(s) within our proposed Zone meet the "70% & 70%" requirement, but others nearby or in the same school district don't. Are we eligible to apply?**
   You are free to define the Zone as narrowly as you'd like; it should include only those schools that meet the requirements.

4. **Are we eligible if one or more of our partners already engage in service-learning programs, or students in the LEA are required to complete service hours?**
   The goal of this initiative is to provide service-learning opportunities to youth that do not already have access to them. The grant will serve a geographic area where less than 30% of the secondary students are already engaged in service-learning.

5. **Does our project need to reach a certain number of youth to be eligible?**
   No, there is no specific requirement or numerical target.

6. **What are the end goal requirements for a successful grantee?**
   School-based service-learning should become part of the curriculum in the participating secondary school(s); OR, community-based service-learning activities will engage no less than 90% of the secondary school students in the zone as part of the program.

Budget

1. **What criteria should be used when developing a budget?**
   Cost-effectiveness and how the budget supports your proposal should be the basis for budget development. Please see the *Application Instructions* (page 11) for more information. Your proposed budget should be sufficient to allow you to perform the tasks described in your proposal narrative and all costs should be justified within your application narrative sections.

2. **Is there a minimum grant amount we must apply for? Do we have to apply for the stated figure?**
   This initiative is intended to provide some fairly comprehensive assistance to communities seeking to engage young people in service-learning activities. Your request should probably stay within +/- $50,000 of the estimated range to be competitive.

3. **What is the required match?**
   Applicants must propose to provide at least 50% of the total program budget as cash or in-kind matching funds – i.e. a dollar-for-dollar match. (For example, if the applicant is requesting $400,000 from the Corporation, the budget should also include $400,000 in matching resources for a total program budget of $800,000.)

4. **Could you define in-kind match support?**
   In-kind match support is defined as the value of a non-cash contribution to the program. Examples would be equipment, supplies, staff time and benefits and the value of goods and services directly benefiting the program.

5. **Must the matching resources come from the lead applicant?**
   The lead applicant is responsible for the full matching share of the grant but the nature of this competition is to encourage collaboration. Any partners that support the program may contribute cash or in-kind match at any level. If the lead applicant can't supply the entire amount, they should identify assets in the community in order to fulfill the match.

6. **May we use other Corporation program funds to match LSA programs?**
   No. You cannot use Corporation funds (LSA, AmeriCorps, Senior Corps) to match LSA programs. However, you may be able to use other federal funds as a match only if the other agency permits such use.

7. **If we have previously received LSA funding, will our application be reviewed differently?**
   All applications will be evaluated using the criteria set out in the NOFA. You can view this document at:
   http://www.learnandserve.gov/for_organizations/funding/nofa_detail.asp?tbl_nofa_id=82

8. **We would like to include as part of our Learn and Serve America application a partnership with AmeriCorps. Is this allowed?**
   Yes, but you cannot use Corporation dollars from one program to match dollars in another program. However, LSA funds may be used to provide for the supervision and training of national service participants engaged in the service-learning program. Learn and Serve America encourages applicants to collaborate with other Corporation programs since it improves their ability to meet program goals. If you are applying for grants from a variety of programs, you cannot make the success of your program dependent upon receiving a grant through another competition and you should make certain that the activities fall within the scope of your approved program. (Please contact your Program Officer if you are unsure.).

9. **What portion of a person's salary may be used for the program?**
   Only the portion that supports the Learn and Serve America program.

10. **Can funds be used to pay for participant incentives, stipends or other wages?**
    No. Learn and Serve funds cannot be used to pay stipends, allowances, or other financial support paid to any program participant except as reimbursement for transportation, meals, and other reasonable out-of-pocket expenses directly related to program participation. Minor expenses for identification of service-

learning participants or recognition of excellent or outstanding participant service are allowable. The purpose of this grant is to promote volunteerism and voluntary civic engagement among young people.

11. **If we plan to purchase two computers at the cost of $5,000 each, would this be an equipment cost?**
    Yes. If the acquisition cost is $5,000 or more per unit, it is considered equipment. If it is less than $5,000 per unit, it is considered supplies. Purchases of equipment are limited to 10 percent of the total LSA share.

12. **Can you clarify the calculation of the administrative/indirect cost?**
    Details are provided on page 14 of the *Application Instructions*. The applicant may choose one of two methods to calculate the administrative/indirect cost section. Corporation Fixed Percentage Method, or Federally Approved Indirect Cost (IDC) Rate Method. With method 2, whether or not you use the entire IDC rate to calculate administrative costs is up to you. The instructions are found on the competition website: **http://www.learnandserve.gov/for_organizations/funding/nofa_detail.asp?tbl_nofa_id=82**

Evaluation

1. **Where can we get help in developing an independent evaluation?**
   There are resources available through Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse: NSLC resources. In addition, publications from the United Way of America and the Kellogg Foundation provide an overview of outcome-based evaluation, including an introduction to performance measurement, steps for measuring program outcomes, examples of outcomes and outcome indicators for various programs, and the resources needed for measuring outcomes. The Corporation also encourages programs to partner with organizations and individuals in your local area who can provide evaluation assistance. For example, many programs have successfully partnered with local higher education institutions that are routinely engaged in evaluating the effectiveness of programs.

2. **How can we pay for an independent evaluation?**
   Programs may request funds for evaluation in their application.

3. **Is there a preference for external rather than internal evaluations?**
   There is no requirement. Your strategy depends on the proposed program design, the organization and its capacity. Some internal evaluations can be very useful tools for improving programs. Be sure the evaluation relates to the program and shows how the program will use evaluation findings to improve.

4. **If a community partner has completed an assessment, can this be mentioned?**
   Yes, as long as it is relevant to your application.

eGrants

1. **Where can we find help with eGrants?**
   If you encounter a problem using the eGrants system, you may call the eGrants help desk at **1-888-677-7849**. The help desk is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. EST Monday through Friday. Or, you may contact the eGrants help desk email at **eGrantshelp@cns.gov**.

2. **We're filling out the eGrants application and don't know our State Application Identifier. What should we put in this section?**
   Please enter N/A for this section.

3. **Who can create an eGrants account for an organization?**
   Work within your organization to find out who is best to set up an eGrants account. Once the account is set up, the organization may permit others to create user accounts connected to that organization account. A Grantee Administrator (a user role in eGrants, not a specific person within your organization) controls who can access the organization account.

4. **Can you periodically save what you enter in the eGrants system and return at another time to add information or complete the application?**
   Yes. Though eGrants will prompt you to save when you exit a screen, we encourage you to save often as you work on your application. We suggest that applicants type information in a word processing document and, when complete and accurate, paste this information into the application.

5. **What is the character limit for an LSA application narrative?**
   Separate character limits are given for each section in the *Application Instructions*:
   http://www.learnandserve.gov/for_organizations/funding/nofa_detail.asp?tbl_nofa_id=82